

BLIZZARD OF '49, WYOMING PUBLIC TELEVISION ORAL HISTORY COLLECTION

Speaker 1: Are we rolling?

Speaker 2: Yup.

Speaker 1: Are we zeroed out?

Speaker 2: Yup.

Speaker 1: We got a card in?

Speaker 2: We do.

Speaker 1: All right.

James: Do you want me to test? Are you able to get my voice fine?

Speaker 2: It's perfect.

Speaker 1: Just state your name for the camera.

James: My name is James Ehrenberger. I live in Cheyenne, Wyoming. I've been a resident of Cheyenne since 1950.

Speaker 1: Okay. Why don't we start out with the day before the blizzard struck, which was January 1st, 1949. I understand from numerous sources that it wasn't too bad of a day.

James: No. January 1st, 1949 was a nice day and really, for wintertime, it was a very nice day. So was the early part of January 2nd. I lived just 50 miles east of the Cheyenne. About 4:00 in the afternoon is when the wind came up and the snow started falling. We didn't see sunshine until the morning of the 5th of January.

Speaker 1: Somebody had called this storm, I think it was Loretta, she said this was called the Blue Northern. She said actually the cloud bank coming in actually had a blue cast to it. Do you recall that?

James: No I don't recall that. I was only about 11 and a half at the time. That particular day, on January 2nd, I was helping my father do inventory in our hardware store. Actually I was working that day. Of course I was just a little runt. I could go up and down the bolt racks and the pipe fitting racks and count different pieces. He was making a manual inventory. No computer in those days.

Speaker 1: You were in Nebraska?

James: Just across the Wyoming border. I was just across the Wyoming border in Bushnell, Nebraska.

Speaker 1: It's near Pine Bluffs?

James: It's 10 miles east of Pine Bluffs.

Speaker 1: Okay. This blizzard [00:02:00] starts on the 2nd and doesn't let up. Can you describe the weather conditions as they progressed through those 3 days?

James: It was about the same every day. We realized that night, on January 2nd, that it was a blizzard. Then of course on the morning of the 3rd and morning of the 4th, each day was just a continual snow and wind. I did manage to walk down to the depot.

At the time, the section men and the agent at the station were talking between each other about some of the trains that were marooned between Cheyenne and Sidney. I enjoyed listening to what was going on. They had thought, at one time, that we may have to open the school for people who are stranded, but it didn't happen. It did elsewhere.

Speaker 1: Right. Right. We'll get to that in a moment. Your home was it, did you have to close off rooms? What were you heating with?

James: We used coal. My father had gone to Hannah and bought a truckload of coal. We had plenty of coal and fuel. The thing that were provisions actually was short was on milk and bread and some certain things like that. However, my mother was quite a baker. She had a barrel of flour. We survived okay.

Speaker 1: I've heard stories about people that houses weren't insulated so great back then and cracks and crevices and that people actually got [00:04:00] snow accumulation, oftentimes in their attics without knowing about it.

James: The problem with the attics was that they had wooden shingles. A lot of the, I'll call it the sub material under the wooden shingles, was not a solid base. There was a distance between they built houses that way. There was a gap there and the snow would blow through those wooden shingles and accumulate in the attics.

Then, of course, having heat in the kitchen or in any of the rooms, then it would melt and ceilings would fall in. It was problem, definitely. One of the worst

places for that was over in Rawlins. They had some places in the south part of Rawlins that was completely buried.

Speaker 1: Yeah, I think I found some photos of those buried homes. Yeah.

James: Yeah.

Speaker 1: This was Sunday, January 2nd. It was following the New Years holiday. There were a lot of people I suppose visiting relatives and college students perhaps starting back for school. A lot of people got stranded in their cars. Isn't that true?

James: It was Sunday, on January 2nd. People came like in some places they went to town for a movie theater or visited relatives or friends. Being that it started in our area at 4:00, here in Cheyenne I've heard that it actually started around 2:00 in the afternoon.

Because of that, people hadn't gotten back home from their Sunday dinners or their visiting. They did get caught on their way home. Some of them couldn't make it home. They just went to someone [00:06:00] else's place and either stayed or, in some cases, I know of some cases where, in the farm area, where people went in. They just moved in temporarily and they helped with the livestock, just like if it was theirs. It worked out okay, but it wasn't pleasant.

Speaker 1: That's the thing that also struck me was that these farm families or ranching families really took in complete strangers into their homes and fed them and just were incredibly kind.

James: The farm and ranch people, at that time especially, had no fear. Even if they were strangers, they took care of everyone that they could. Of course it wasn't all that many because there was only a limited number that could travel. It just happened to be whoever came by is who stayed there.

Speaker 1: I've heard stories about upwards of 30 people in some of these ranch houses and running out of provisions and doing the best they could.

James: Having a larger group may have existed some places I'm sure. I'm not aware of it.

Speaker 1: Of course some people that were stranded in their cars didn't make it to farm houses. They had to spend the duration of that first storm in their cars. Most of them made it through, but I guess there were a few fatalities involved with that too.

James: We really didn't have as many fatalities as one would think. I know of a few. Most of those existed because someone had gotten out of their vehicle and tried

to reach safety. One example was a young couple coming on Highway 85. [00:08:00] They just stuck in a snowdrift up by the Pole Creek Ranch. He left his wife and daughter in the car. He walked to try to get some help. He didn't make it to the ranch.

Speaker 1: Is that the Archuleta family?

James: The Archuleta family was north of Hillsdale. That was Union Pacific section man and wife and I don't know maybe a couple daughters. They attempted to leave from Hillsdale or I believe either Hillsdale or Burns. They went north and then wanted to go west. They got stuck in a snowbank and froze in their vehicle.

Speaker 1: I guess the first one you were talking about, was that that Wayne [Yogi 00:08:49]? The guy that walked-

James: I don't know the name, it was, right offhand.

Speaker 1: Okay. Basically the storm cut off all transportation; trains, airplanes, no cars, no buses could travel because the snow was just so intense and the drifts were so bad?

James: The blizzard of 1949 was not prejudiced. I mean every means of transportation was grounded. Of course the railroad suffered greatly, but the highways also were snowbound. The first thing that really got out was the air travel and transportation. Of course the purpose was to try to help people. They came up with a system to provide even from some of the Army aircraft, they dropped coal. They dropped [00:10:00] medication.

Of course for livestock, they dropped hay. It worked out real well. Again, and this may be something to come up with later but, if it hadn't been for the military and President Truman declared it a natural national disaster, or I can't remember the term. If I hadn't been for the military, there would have been a lot more suffering and loss of life.

Speaker 1: I guess he authorized this General Pick to oversee the effort.

James: This was out of the Omaha Army. General Pick was in charge. Of course here in Wyoming, we had the Wyoming National Guard of course followed with what General Pick ordered. It was a typical military type thing. They knew what they were doing. They brought in a lot of heavy equipment. We were under-equipped. We weren't really equipped for that type thing. They brought in a lot of heavy equipment to clear the roads and to be able to get things back in operation.

Speaker 1: I heard it was the largest bulldozer effort in American history, even more so than during the war.

James: That, I don't know, but I do know that they brought equipment out on railroad trains, especially I saw some pictures the Army took up around Broken Bow, Nebraska in the Sand Hills. It was a whole train of Cats and Weasles. That's something that people wonder what is a weasel? It was a track type vehicle that they would use to get out to the farms and ranches. A lot of this was taking medication and, if someone was sick [00:12:00] or taking care of the people.

Speaker 1: Getting back to these air drops. I seem to recall that isolated ranches, et cetera, could put some sort of signal in the snow for what it was they needed and they would put a pile or this or make an L shape and you'd get medicine.

James: They had symbols.

Speaker 1: Every community I think was a little different.

James: In this area, and what of course I can't speak for a lot of other places, but in this area, fortunately, if they had electricity and their power did not go out during this storm, radio was an important thing. The radio stations provided a lot of help to the people could call in if they needed something.

Out on the prairie, where maybe someone was stranded who didn't have a telephone, and that could have existed at that time, then they could walk out in the snow and perhaps make a X that stood for a certain thing or a certain symbol in the snow or for maybe coal or whatever they needed.

Speaker 1: I think I read that ... Where was I going with this? I can't remember where I was going with this. Oh, the hay drops. The Air Force got involved with this huge operation called Operation Haylift. I guess a lot of the, we can talk about the loss of livestock. They were trying to avert that of course by dropping these bales of hay. Some say it was successful and some [00:14:00] say not so successful. Indeed a lot of livestock perished during the blizzard of '49.

James: There was a great loss in livestock. It was the ranchers and farmers who suffered the most on that type of loss. One of the problems with the livestock, it was of course they needed feed. Dropping the hay was one thing. The other was the fact that they didn't have water. The water tanks were all frozen. That created a additional problem.

Speaker 1: Of course we were talking earlier about the photographs that exist about frozen standing in place.

James: All wildlife and livestock, a lot of it was frozen because it was so terribly cold and, with that velocity of wind that we had, they just froze in their tracks.

Speaker 1: Let's get to the railroads and especially what happened around Egbert and Hillsdale with the Streamliners and the passengers on board.

James: Since the blizzard struck on the afternoon of January 2nd, the eastward passenger trains, they ran in fleets. The evening trains, most of them, operated eastward. Then in the early morning, out of Nebraska, came the westward trains. The Union Pacific had a fleet of Streamliners, 3 of them every day. The problem that they had was that [00:16:00] the block signals, they could not view the block signals. The snow had covered up the lenses.

What they had to do was try to send the trains ahead after another train had cleared the next station. They would only go from station to station with the trains. As a result, the first train in the morning westbound was the Los Angeles Limited. It had a steam locomotive on it. It stopped at Hillsdale. That was the end of the trip it made because it froze to the track and Hillsdale. Then next passenger train was the City of Portland. It was stopped at Egbert. Egbert had an agent, so they could tell when the trains had moved.

The City of Portland was stuck at Egbert, as well as a couple of freight trains. Because of all those cars off the freight trains and the passenger train, the snow just blew in under and above everything. It was stuck for a long time. Then the next Streamliner was at Pine Bluffs. That was the City of Los Angeles. The third Streamliner was held at Kimball, Nebraska. That was the City of San Francisco. They sent a steam engine out from Sidney to provide steam because the diesel locomotive boilers couldn't handle it.

They sent a steam locomotive out. Well that was okay if it only lasted overnight, but it continued on too long. They had to drain what was left of the steam locomotive boiler and it froze to the track [00:18:00]. They walked the passengers from the Streamliner over to The Wheat Grower's Hotel. That's where they stayed. The dining car employees worked in the hotel, in their kitchen, to take care of-

Speaker 1: This was where?

James: In Kimball.

Speaker 1: In Kimball.

James: Some people also went to private residences.

Speaker 1: These passengers I think I read weren't really dressed for that kind of weather.

James: No, no. They didn't anticipate terribly cold weather or a snowstorm. They just thought they were going from Chicago to San Francisco. They wasn't prepared for that. They had another train, that was a mail train, that was at the next station east, at Dix. Then they held everything else. They didn't run anymore. It was well over a week before this segment between Cheyenne and Sidney was put back into service.

Now that was the first storm that really ... This 1949 was a combination of storms. It was a bad winter. It started in November in eastern Colorado and Kansas, western Kansas, and on up through central Nebraska. Then in January, on January 2nd, east of Sherman Hill especially is where we had the snowstorm in this area. Then we missed school for one week. I understand some places, like down around Grover, Colorado, they missed school for about a month. They really had trouble there.

hen we went back to school and there were several times they let us out of school early because the wind came up and they were afraid of another storm. The second part [00:20:00] of the big blizzards during that winter was over west of Laramie. It hit on about February, around February 5th. That storm lasted for 2 weeks. The Union Pacific had one of the greatest tie ups that they ever had and so many trains involved.

At one time, at Green River, which is where they held eastward passenger trains, they had 21 trains waiting at Green River to get through. They couldn't make it so they took the back to Salt Lake City and operated them over the Denver and Rio Grande track to Denver. One of the big problems they had west of Laramie over west of Rock River was that they derailed. They had a snowplow. It derailed, so that tied the railroad up. It didn't take long with the strong winds and all the problems that other trains that had stopped at Hannah and Medicine Bow and in the area, they were snowed in.

When they get snowbound like that, they can't just pull the whole train out. They have to take them out one or two cars at a time because otherwise they could derail. That snow was so hard. It was like cement. In fact, some places I understand they had to use blasting ... They had to blast it out because it was so hard. Then, in around February the 18th, they managed to get the line open between Laramie and Rawlins. The first train that went through was a train load of hay.

The next train that came east was a train load of coal, because people were using a lot of coal in those days and they were running short on provisions [00:22:00]. That took another probably close to a week before they got back into

a normal operation. I think it was about 3 weeks total. The same storm that hit over in the Laramie area also went up the Platte River toward Casper. The Burlington at Casper was snowbound.

There again, another situation the Chicago Northwestern, east of Casper over toward Lusk, that was snowbound. Then further north, up toward Newcastle and the Black Hills, that was snowbound. It just was a continual thing. It cost the railroads millions of dollars. Millions in those days is a lot of money today.

Speaker 1: Right. We were talking to a guy over in Douglas that lived in Nebraska. He was I guess a senior in high school. They hired him and a bunch of people to go out with their shovels and actually dig these trains out by hand.

James: They used everything they could. On the Union Pacific, they had these big rotary snowplows. They were like a snow blower. They had about 20 of those operating at one time. They even borrowed some equipment from other railroads where they could get it. They used flame throwers. They contracted like with Morrison Knutson Company, who was a big contractor who built roads and other types of things. They came in with their equipment. It was a massive project.

Speaker 1: Because they used these rotary plows I guess because the V plows just the stuff was so tough [00:24:00] to get through that even the V plows would get stuck.

James: The V plows, the problem with those is two things. One, the snow was so hard packed that they really couldn't get through it that well. The other thing is that they have a tendency of derailing easily because of the ice build up on the rail. Then they'll climb over and derail. That happened west of Casper on the Burlington.

I obtained a picture of one of those. Of course the main lines are the first things that they cleared, but then the branch lines came later, like the Saratoga between, on the Saratoga and [Canlett 00:24:44] line. It was about 40 days between the train operation. The same on the Burlington that came into Cheyenne from Sterling. It was about 40 days before they opened up the line.

Speaker 1: When cars derail out in the middle of nowhere like that, how did they get them back on the tracks. Some guy was talking about something saying that they were using something called frogs?

James: A small derailment, a frog is just a chunk of steel that's shaped in a certain way that they could put over the track and they can pull a car back over that frog and normally they'll go back on. If you have a whole train or quite a few things, like a wedged snowplow, those wedged snowplows are so heavy that it would take

more than a frog to get one of those back on the track. They had to bring in a derrick. There again is another delay situation. There is a lot involved in it.

Speaker 1: Okay. Let's see. What else we got here? Maybe we can talk about, I'm going to be [00:26:00] talking to the weather guy. Let's talk a little bit about how they blew it. Weather predictions weren't very accurate back then because they didn't have the technology we have today.

James: Weather predictions, in 1949, was skeptical I'll say. My brother always said the best way to know what's going on is to step outside and look. They missed. They missed the forecast on this 1949 blizzard. I think part of the problem is that the way that the lows and the highs and all the details on the weather is that these things can move around a little, and it did. They clashed. It was 2 storms. We have the up-slope problems here in the front range and then of course the Canadian front. The two clashed. It just wouldn't go away, just wouldn't go away. It liked us.

Speaker 1: Good. I think that the subsequent storms, they may have been a little bit more accurate on. I don't know.

James: I think so too. Yeah. They knew that. Of course they were prepared a lot better in the subsequent storms, except for that problem like the Union Pacific had with that derailment. I was told that the wind was blowing so hard and the snow coming down that it was like they couldn't stay out in the conditions very long. It was like needles hit them in the face and so on.

Speaker 1: Yeah, we had several people talk about what they did to protect their faces. One guy [00:28:00] that was going out to dig out the train, his mother put cut eye holes in paper bags so that he could go out. The other guy put a bucket over his head. I'm wondering how in the hell he saw.

James: I think people are innovative. They would do about anything to protect themselves.

Speaker 1: Right. I know that there's the newspaper articles, but can you talk about Rockport just a little bit from what you know?

James: I've heard a lot of stories. That's one of the first things I remember people talking about. When I started collecting material on the 1949 blizzard of course I've witnessed it myself, but I was interested in it. In the mid-1950's I started gathering information and talking with people. Rockport came to light several times from individuals about how bad the situation was at Rockport. Rockport located about oh I think about 15 miles south of Cheyenne, was a gas station and a nightclub. They served food also, a small facility.

Of course people on Highway US 85, traveling between Cheyenne and Denver, and some of them probably returning home after their weekend in Denver, they couldn't make it any further than Rockport is where they tied up. In addition to that, there was a Greyhound bus with all of their passengers in this small facility. They were just jam packed in there. I think there was a problem with the management as time went on in pricing and [00:30:00] also the soup I heard was good at first, but then it got watered down near the end. I just don't know a whole lot more about it, other than just secondhand information.

Speaker 1: I suspect he was running out of provisions too with all those people.

James: With that many people, he was not prepared for it. It was a real problem. I'm sure as soon as possible, they got in there and got the highway cleared. Conditions were miserable. We'll put it that way.

Speaker 1: Good. Good. Do you know much about ... I'm going to be talking to Game and Fish today. Do you want to talk about wildlife loss at all?

James: One of the main things that I heard about wildlife was, and this might be something that Game and Fish can back up my statement. I heard that up in the area around Hawk Springs that they used to have a lot of pheasants. It was really noted for good pheasant hunting and that after this blizzard, it wiped out the pheasants.

Speaker 1: Where's Hawk Springs?

James: Hawk Springs is between here and Torrington on US 85. It's south of Torrington, about probably 25 miles.

Speaker 1: Okay. Did you, in talking with folks and doing research, did you ever run across anything about how the Native Americans handled this blizzard?

James: Again, this is secondhand information. I heard from more than one source that the Indian Reservation up in South Dakota was [00:32:00] one of the last areas to be cleared. One party told me it was almost April 1st before they got in there. How true that is, I can't back it up. I think there surely should be someone that could help you on that.

Speaker 1: What about I was talking about to folks that lived in ranches and folks that lived in towns and saying a lot of them were kids at the time and saying, "Gees you know that would seem like to me to be a winter wonderland to play in."

James: The kids did have a lot of fun because the snowbanks was from the rooftops on down. If you could get up to the roof, you could slide down the snowbanks. That, no doubt, happened some places. I guess they probably had to work mostly.

Speaker 1: Yeah a lot of the ranch kids said, "We didn't have that much fun because we had too many chores to do and the wind was just too damn cold."

James: During the storm it would have been. All this would have been after the storm because on that January 5th, I went out and took some pictures of the street scenes and some of the snowbanks. Then later on, I even tunneled through one of them. It was still 10 or 12 feet high snowbank on the streets.

Speaker 1: Did you hear stories about the Wyoming Department of Transportation being overwhelmed when they started to try to clear the roads and it just fell right back in again as soon as they started plowing?

James: I'll have to say the Highway Department is probably [00:34:00] the most experienced group of people for snow conditions as anyone in the country. What caught them somewhat short is the fact that the type of equipment that this blizzard created that they would have needed was not located in this area. Rotary snowplows and some of that was usually kept in the mountainous areas, like around Jackson and up in that area.

They really didn't have that type of equipment here. They had to bring in equipment. It was a problem for them too. Then of course, all areas, and this is where the rural and the ranch and farm people, they'd go in and plow it out one day and the next day they had to back in and plow it out again. The wind. It was just a windy winter. A lot of wind with that amount of snow, it had nowhere to go except drift.

Speaker 1: Right. We were talking about it earlier just generally in the state, it seemed like the hardest hit portions were the areas along the Nebraska line, coming down the eastern edge of Wyoming and then into Cheyenne, kind of like a reverse L into Laramie and Rawlins. I think the rest of the state had a pretty bad winter too, west of The Divide, but it wasn't nearly what was going on east of The Divide was it?

James: 1949 or 1948 and 1949 was just a rough winter all over. Areas west of The Continental Divide did have snow conditions. Actually Los Angeles even had a couple of inches of snow. Up in Idaho [00:36:00] a lot of the railroad tracks in Idaho were snowed in.

Speaker 1: I heard it got as far down as Texas?

James: No, not that I know of. Southern Colorado, on Cumbres Pass, on the Rio Grande narrow gauge, it was snowed in. It was all over in the mountainous, in the snow belt, is what it was.

Speaker 1: The Plains areas, Nebraska and Kansas.

James: The Plains, Nebraska. Nebraska in the '49 was Nebraska was harder hit than Kansas in '49. In '48, Kansas got it. Also north of Nebraska, into South Dakota and even North Dakota, had snow problems.

Speaker 1: Nebraska was harder hit than this side of Wyoming?

James: The Sand Hills and a lot of areas in Nebraska was hit harder I would say, other than that situation over west of Laramie around Rock River, in that area.

Speaker 1: I had read that the official, after it was over that first storm here in Cheyenne, the official snow measurement was something like 16 inches of snow or something. It had to be more than that.

James: Cheyenne, I've read that where there's about 16 inches of snow, but I just don't think they could measure it very well. I think the other thing is, and what I've read, is like up around Shadow, Nebraska that they had like 30 inches of snow and 60 miles an hour wind and 30 below zero and so on. That's the thing. It's a combination of all those things that created this problem.

Speaker 1: I'm going to ask the weather guy too [00:38:00] about this because I had read also somewhere that snow measurements are a really fickle thing. The colder and drier it is, if you take a liquid measure, which is what they do, you get way, way more snow when it's colder and drier than the wet stuff. I think I read somewhere that most people thought that around Cheyenne here it was around 28 inches of snow.

James: That I really ... I guess it's a matter of opinion.

Speaker 1: Yeah. Let's see. What else? Talked about that. This Operation Haylift. I guess they were doing it out of Rawlins in Wyoming and they were doing it out of Casper. Then I think they were doing the big operation was in Nebraska and then down out of Lowry and Denver?

James: Yeah. It was all over where there was livestock areas. For example, the Air Guard or I don't know.

Speaker 1: Civil Air Patrol?

James: Maybe just what we had was maybe the Army Guard. They flew these planes around in the area. There's a photograph of one of them flying over the City of Portland at Egbert. I should send that to James.

Speaker 1: I think I've-

James: Maybe you've seen it. Okay.

Speaker 1: Yeah.

James: Yeah they were ... Because over in Carbon County, that's where that picture shows them coming in with trucks. They did the same up around Lusk [00:40:00]. They had the hay patrol with the trucks.

Speaker 1: Okay. I guess there were a lot of agencies involved; the Red Cross, the Highway Department. They were all coordinated centrally I think by the Army finally?

James: Yeah it was, this thing had to be coordinated. I'm trying to think. There was our National Guard here in Wyoming. He wasn't a General I don't think, but he was high up. He was part of that coordinating group. They had, see because of the government and the disaster area, they also funded a lot of things, like say a county that had some certain expense like maybe repairs to vehicles and things like that. They would get a reimbursement on that. It had to be centralized in order to make it work.

Speaker 1: I guess I think each county probably had their own committee that-

James: Oh yeah.

Speaker 1: ... higher up?

James: Most of that probably was County Commissioners and people that had some authority.

Speaker 1: I'd read that mostly the electricity and telephone lines pretty much held for most people. Then if they didn't, if people were listening to the radio and the FCC had lifted their regulations on what could be talked about, like personal messages, over the air.

James: I don't know about that message thing, but I do know that the [00:42:00] telephone and the electric was functioning pretty close to I'm sure 100 percent. It didn't seem to knock down the lines. There was a problem. If a rancher had ... Some ranches didn't have [folm 00:42:22] electricity like the REA brought in later. They may have had like a Delco plant that was 32 volt or even some people

used battery radios. Some of those had problems because a lot of static from those.

Speaker 1: Yeah that's what people were reporting that I was talking to. Speaking of static electricity, these folks over in Lusk said that static electricity in Lusk was just a terrible problem. This one guy said he had sparks shooting out of guns mounted on the wall. It's just incredible. Everything he touched something metal, he would just, it would be just, because it was so dry and that wind just sucked all the humidity out of the air I guess.

James: I know on battery radios it was a problem.

Speaker 1: Yeah, yeah.

James: They had none.

Speaker 1: Right. Right. This other woman told me, and I don't know if you've heard reports of this, that when the storm moved in over the Lusk area, it was thundering and lightening during the snowstorm.

James: That's possible. I don't recall that.

Speaker 1: I'll ask the weather guy about that, if that's a possible thing. Okay. That's more city stuff. Let's talk about ... I guess we're getting to the end here.

James: It looks to me like it, yeah.

Speaker 1: Let's talk about the aftermath. I've heard reports that the last, in some places, the last of the snowdrifts didn't melt down until July and also were there tremendous mud problems after all this [00:44:00] moisture and was it a green spring?

James: I was 11 and a half. That I don't remember green or what, but after the big storm and all the conditions that came along, in my memory, what I do recall, one of the first things there were still snowbanks and it was in March that downtown in the little town of Bushnell, they had a pool hall and a little restaurant there. I remember seeing 4 or 5 huge trucks parked on the street. They had animal carcasses in the trucks. It was from the rendering works at Scotts Bluff. They came over and loaded a lot of animal carcasses.

Then, as far as how long that snow remained, I think that would depend on a lot of conditions. There could be some gullies where it really got in there and some certain shade that it could have lasted quite a while. Now when it comes to high

water, there was some problems reported on the railroads where they had soft track and some water problems in some areas.

Speaker 1: In the spring?

James: Yeah, in the spring. Most of that was not on the major lines as much as on the branch lines where they didn't have the surfacing that other railroad lines had. That's really about as much as I can think of.

Speaker 1: Finally, to wrap it up, a lot of ... Some people, as I've gone through these towns and have these meetings, some of the younger people are going, "Well yeah [00:46:00] but we had some bad winters in 1970s and 1980s." All the older folks in the audience just shook their heads and said, "Not like that one."

James: I agree with folks that will say that this was the blizzard of the century, as far as those of us that lived through it and in the area where we lived. Now other parts of the United States, like New York may have had other blizzards of the century, but this was ours. Comparing the 1949 blizzard with all of the subsequent storms that we've had, and they've been many, and I've observed them, there's nothing that compared with the 1949 blizzard.

Now the subsequent storms, while they produced a lot of snow and a lot of drifting and things were tied up, it was not the duration of what the 1949 blizzard was. Of course we have improved a lot with our methods of snow removal and some of our four-wheel drive equipment and different things so we can get out better. All of the storms that have hit since the 1949 winter have all been of short duration.

I have photographs that will prove how it would blow a railroad cut shut in 1977, but you look in the distance, the prairie is clear. That didn't happen in 1949. At the end of 1948, in the Saratoga area, they reported 14 inches of snow on the level. They had already to go in and feed the livestock because of the snow that they had [00:48:00]. Then here you get the big blizzard on January 2nd or right after, then it just never did clear up. Nothing compares with the 1949 blizzard.

Speaker 1: You were a kid. Did you shovel a lot of snow?

James: I played with the shovel. Yeah, a little bit. Yeah. I made a tunnel. I tunneled in front of our hardware store because it was such a high drift and the grocery store is across the street. To shorten the distance, I put in a tunnel. Anyway. I agree with the folks that say that nothing compares with it.

Speaker 1: Yeah. That's all I've got. Anything else that you think we missed?

James: No, I think we covered a lot. I probably said too much.

Speaker 1: We'll use 2 minutes.

James: Yeah, yeah. I'll be looking for 20 seconds. Let's see, yeah it will be 20 seconds on the-